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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the development of the Basic Skills Model, a theoretical framework that has enabled North Carolina educators to propose to the Department of Public Instruction the development of a curriculum for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities. The curriculum is designed to enable students to gain the necessary skills to cope with various unexpected, difficult situations and promote independent and self-determined behavior. The main outline of the curriculum is presented and includes the development of skills in the following areas: (1) self-knowledge; (2) assertiveness training; (3) problem solving skills; (4) self-advocacy skills; and (5) leadership skills. Current trends in the field of developmental disabilities are discussed and 25 elements of self-determination are listed. Appendices also include a list of personal outcome measures, the skills model, North Carolina graduation and course of study requirements, and principles of the occupational course of study on self-advocacy and problem solving. (CR)

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# DEVELOPMENT OF A HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM THAT PROMOTES SELF-DETERMINATION AND INDEPENDENCE SKILLS

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## ***Current trends in the field of developmental disabilities***

The following trends influence the current developments in the field:

1. *Strong emphasis on self-determination for individuals with mental retardation as a cluster of characteristics that lead to positive outcomes in adult life.*

   Individuals with developmental disabilities are expected to take control over the decisions made in their lives without any undue external influence or interference (Wehmeyer, Kelchner, & Richards, 1996.) The following table summarizes the most important self-determination characteristics that many authors emphasize when they try to define the self-determination concept.

### 25 Elements of self-determination

Sources: Field & Hoffman (1994); Powers, Singer et al. (1996); Sands & Wehmeyer (1996); Wehmeyer (1998).

- Knowledge of strengths and weaknesses
- Self-realization, self-understanding and self-awareness
- Assertiveness
- Authority
- Freedom
- Support
- Responsibility
- Determining what is important
- Taking care of yourself
- Decision-making
- Choice making
- Self-advocacy
- Internal locus of control
- Setting, planning, and achieving goals
- Taking risks
- Communicating and listening
- Negotiating
- Dealing with conflict and criticism
- Evaluating outcomes
- Adjusting performance
- Problem solving
- Self-regulation
- Leadership
- Personal control
- Autonomous behavior

2. *Paradigm shift in the evaluation of successful special education programs and service delivery in general.*

   How successful are we, special educators in achieving the educational outcomes we are aiming for? What are the outcomes of our efforts? Over time, we changed the way we measure success in education in general, and in developmental disabilities in particular. The trend in the field is to move from **clinical outcomes** (those outcomes considered desirable by professionals) to **personal outcomes** (those outcomes that are considered successes, valuable achievements, by the persons with disabilities themselves.) The Council on Quality and Leadership in Supports for People with

Disabilities is constantly trying to improve the way to define outcomes for persons with developmental disabilities and the Appendix A at the end of this paper is presenting their current version of Personal outcomes. More information can be found on the Council's web site at http://www.accredcouncil.org/

3. *The recent emphasis on adult outcomes has led to the recognition of the so-called "top down" approaches to curriculum development for teaching life skills.*

In the top-down approach the outcomes are examined first to provide a basis for working down to the development of the curriculum. The top-down approach also implies a developmental perspective. The most desirable outcomes usually fall into either one of these categories: 1. Community inclusion or 2. Better quality of life. Therefore, the high-school curriculum objectives might lead to "community inclusion preparedness" before community inclusion per se happens.

4. *Tremendous amount of research showing the importance of basic social skills in ensuring the success of community integration of individuals with developmental disabilities, particularly in competitive employment settings.*

- Chadsey-Rusch (1992) *suggested that there are two major behavioral categories for ensuring employment success: production skills performed at some acceptable criterion, or task-related skills, and effective social skills, or nontask related skills.*
- Brickey, Campbell, & Browning (1985); Greenspan & Schoultz (1981) *showed that deficits in social behaviors of people with mental retardation are more likely to constitute the cause of employment termination, than nonsocial behaviors such as job productivity*
- Lovett & Harris (1987); Salzberg, Agran, & Lignugaris/Kraft (1986) *have shown that the employers and the individuals with disabilities themselves consider nontask related behaviors even more important than production related ones*

5. *Recent statistics show that the number of young people with mental retardation entering competitive employment is substantially lower than for any other disability.*

Data from the US Department of Education[1] show that only 40% of the youth with mental retardation, mostly with mild retardation, are competitively employed after graduating from high school, less than 4% are enrolled in postsecondary education, and only 14% are living independently. However, other data[2] show that only 27.8% of

[1] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, *The Seventeenth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act,* The National Longitudinal Transition Study, 1995.
[2] Disability and Employment. (1996.) M.P. LaPlante, J.Kennedy, H.S. Kaye, and B.L. Wenger, Disability Statistics, Abstract #11, Washington, DC: NIDDR.


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working-age people with work disabilities have jobs, compared to 76.3% of those without disabilities. Louis Harris and Associates (1994) found that approximately two thirds of Americans with disabilities of working age were not working, with only 20% working full time and 11% working part time, showing no improvement since a similar national poll conducted in 1984. This poll also found that 84% of unemployed individuals with disabilities say they want to work. The National Longitudinal Study (NLTS) of students with special disabilities conducted by SRI International and published in June 1993 portrays a picture of life after high school for students who have received special education services that does not meet the expectations for independent and productive participation in the community. All sources show that, despite recent improvement in support services and vocational education and substantial funds being used to support these services, individuals with disabilities continue to experience a high unemployment rate and dissatisfaction with their quality of life. For people with mental retardation, one of the identified reasons for not securing or for losing jobs is not so much the lack of job-related skills, but a more general inability to deal with unexpected situations flexibly.

**FOLLOW-UP STUDIES ON ADULT OUTCOMES OF FORMER SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS**

| | |
|---|---|
| Drop-out rate of those enrolled in secondary special education | 30% |
| Chances of obtaining a full-time job | 35% |
| Former high school students employed competitively | 46% |

Review of 25 follow-up studies of former special education students (Halpern, 1989)

| | |
|---|---|
| Employed (mostly entry-level jobs) | 58% |
| Earned wages at or below poverty level | 33-50% |

Edgar (1987) study of 39 high school graduates with mild mental retardation found

| | |
|---|---|
| Working in some form of vocational training | 41% |
| Doing little or nothing | 59% |

Haring and Lovett (1990): out of their sample of 58 former students with mental retardation.

| | |
|---|---|
| In employment-related placements | 67% |
| Competitively employed but with minimum pay | 6% |
| Employed in sheltered workshops with very low wages | 38% |
| In day activity programs receiving no pay | 18% |

Therefore:

- To function successfully in adulthood, one must have the knowledge and skills to handle the various situations that arise and/or be able to access supports and services when needed.

- For persons with Mental Retardation "graduation" is often not a symbol for acquired competencies, but rather an "image" of adherence to community standards.

## The Generic Skills Model

Based on the literature review and our own previous results of a program in problem solving skills (Olley, Paraschiv, & Allison, 1997) we have developed a model of basic skills composition (See diagram of the Skills Model in Appendix B.). The major assumption regarding basic skills model is that a specific set of cognitive and behavioral skills plays a mediating role in facilitating the use of other skills and in consequence, in the overall quality of social adequacy of the person. The model emphasizes the difference between specific skills such as how to introduce yourself to another person or how to fill out a bank deposit slip, and general basic skills such as controlling one's emotional outbursts and solving problems. Both types of skills are needed for successful community inclusion, but studies and observations in the field have suggested that 1) the learning of basic, general skills such as social problem solving abilities is more difficult than the learning of contextual skills and 2) that the mastery of fundamental coping skills is more important in work settings than job-related skills. The learning of a basic, non-specific set of strategies will enable adolescents with developmental disabilities to access various specific skills they have acquired. Generic strategies such as problem solving and self-regulation can be used as a means of using the repertoire of social and non-social skills they possess.

Presently, in North Carolina, a high school student can choose one of four tracks to obtain a diploma: the Career Prep track (Vocational), College Tech Prep, College Prep (4 year college), and the Occupational Course of Study. The NC Board of Education has approved in August 1999 the *Occupational Course of Study* (OCS) as one of the four courses of study that, if successfully completed will lead to a State sanctioned diploma. Appendix C is presenting the North Carolina Graduation and Course of Study Requirements.

The Basic Skills Model has a theoretical framework that enabled us to propose to the Department of Public Instruction the development of a curriculum for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities. This curriculum will enable them to gain the necessary skills to cope with various unexpected, difficult situations and will promote independent and self-determined behavior. The main outline of the curriculum is presented in Appendix D. and it will be one of the required courses of study for graduation.

During the next year the curriculum development team will get feedback from various focus groups (formed by parents, teachers, students who graduated from high school, employers, etc.), will write the definite educational goals and objectives, and will develop the resource manual with the lesson plans and specific activities. In the following phase of the project (the following two years) we will field test the curriculum, gather research data, suggestions and input from teachers, students, parents, school administrators, self-advocates, etc. and we will modify the curriculum accordingly.

Appendix E is presenting the most important principles that will be followed in writing the curriculum on Self-Advocacy and Problem Solving.

## APPENDIX A

## PERSONAL OUTCOME MEASURES

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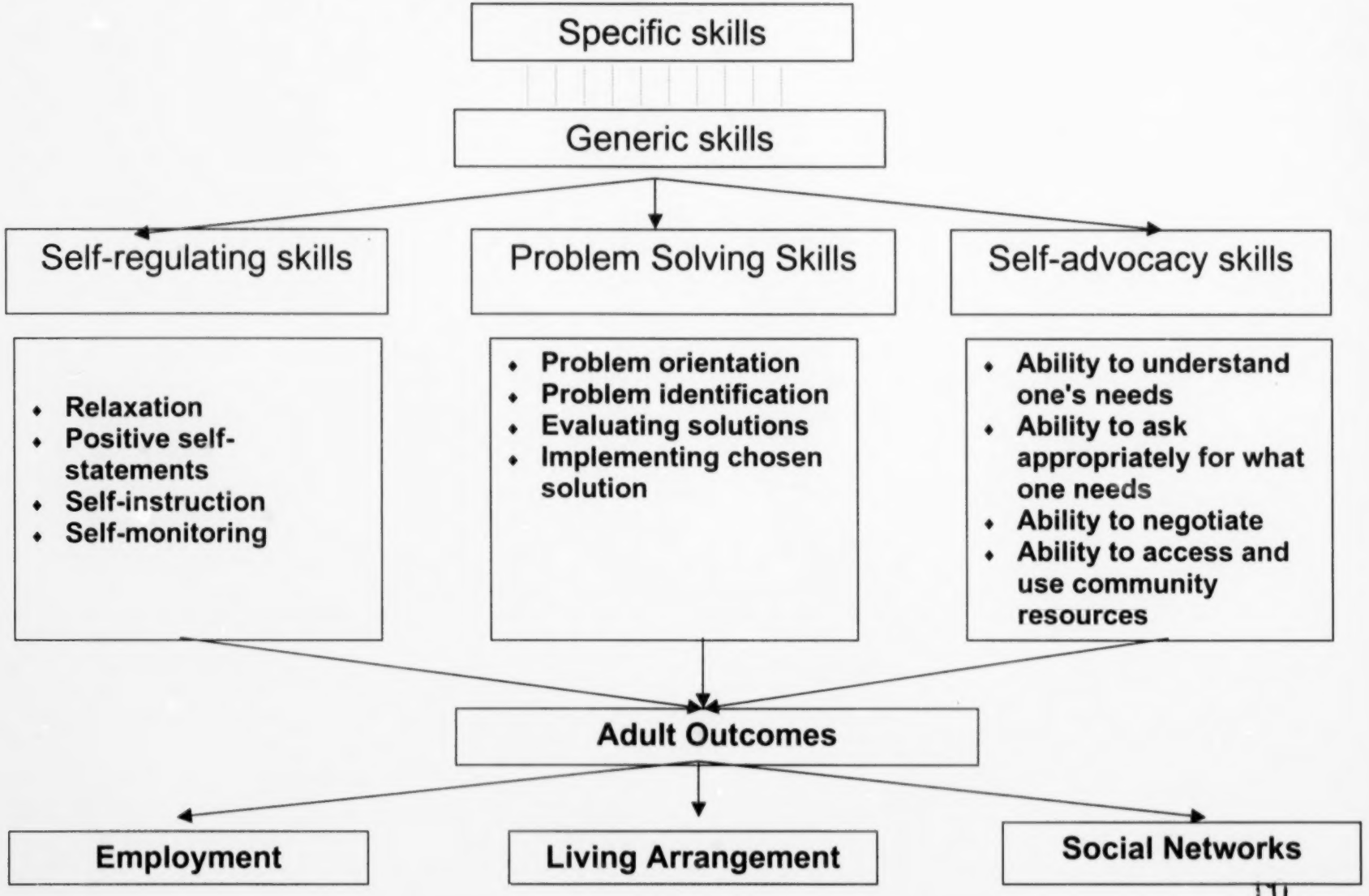
| | |
|---|---|
| IDENTITY | People choose personal goals.<br>People choose where and with whom they live.<br>People choose where they work.<br>People have intimate relationships.<br>People are satisfied with services.<br>People are satisfied with their personal life situations. |
| AUTONOMY | People choose their daily routine.<br>People have time, space, and opportunity for privacy.<br>People decide when to share personal information.<br>People use their environments. |
| AFFILIATION | People live in integrated environments.<br>People participate in the life of the community.<br>People interact with other members of the community.<br>People perform different social roles.<br>People have friends.<br>People are respected. |
| ATTAINMENT | People choose services.<br>People realize personal goals. |
| SAFEGUARDS | People are connected to natural support networks.<br>People are safe. |
| RIGHTS | People exercise rights.<br>People are treated fairly. |
| HEALTH | People have the best possible health. |
| WELLNESS | People are free from abuse and neglect.<br>People experience continuity and security. |

APPENDIX B:

# Skills model



APPENDIX C

# North Carolina Graduation and Course of Study Requirements

| CONTENT AREA | Career Prep (Vocational) | College Tech Prep | College Prep (4 year college) | Occupational Course |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ENGLISH | 4 Courses (I,II,III,IV) | 4 Courses (I,II,III,IV) | 4 Courses (I,II,III,IV) | 4 Courses (Occupational English) |
| MATH | 3 Courses | 3 Courses | 3 Courses | 3 Courses Occupational Math |
| SCIENCE | 3 Courses | 3 Courses | 3 Courses | 3 Courses (Life Science) |
| SOCIAL STUDIES | 3 Courses | 3 Courses | 3 Courses | 6 Courses (citizenship. Work-based learning, employability skills, 300 hrs school-based training 240 hrs community based training 400 hrs paid employment) |
| FOREIGN LANGUAGE | Not required | | | |
| COMPUTER SKILLS | A specific course is not required but students must demonstrate proficiency through state testing | | | Determined by the IEP |
| HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION | 1 Course Health/Physical Education | | | |
| CAREER/ TECHNICAL | 4 Units of Credits | 4 Units of Credits | Not Required | 7 Credits Vocational Education |
| ARTS EDUCATION | Not required | | | |
| ELECTIVES | Must be included | Must be included | Must be included | Vocational education |
| TOTAL | Depends on local requirements | Depends on local requirements | Depends on local requirements | |
| EXIT REQUIREMENTS | Proficiency on exit exam | Proficiency on exit exam | Proficiency on exit exam | Meet IEP Objectives No Exit Exam |

11

12

## APPENDIX D.

### PROPOSED OCCUPATIONAL YEAR- LONG COURSE OF STUDY
### SELF-ADVOCACY AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

| AREA DOMAIN | EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES |
|---|---|
| Self-Knowledge | Learning Individual Characteristics |
| | Individual Preferences |
| | Facts about their Disability |
| | Personal Strengths and Weaknesses |
| | Personal Goal Setting |
| Assertiveness training | How to express one's feelings |
| | How to get your point across |
| | How to present yourself to other people |
| | How to communicate effectively |
| Problem Solving Skills | Coping with puzzling, difficult situations |
| | Using a strategy to calm negative feelings |
| | Finding solutions to reach personal goals |
| | Finding solutions to overcome barriers |
| Self-advocacy Skills | Knowing your and other people's rights |
| | Speaking up for yourself |
| | Recognizing situations when self-advocacy is needed |
| Leadership Skills | Personal Organization Skills |
| | Work habits (individually and in groups) |
| | Advanced Communication Skills |
| | Advanced Social and Networking Skills |

## APPENDIX E.
## PRINCIPLES OF THE OCCUPATIONAL COURSE OF STUDY ON SELF-ADVOCACY AND PROBLEM SOLVING

**1. Teacher as facilitator**
-The group has the most important role and the role of the teacher/leader is to facilitate the group members to be actively involved and in control of the activities which take place in the group.

**2. Group learning**
-Involve more students - learning by doing
-Participants can learn by imitation
-Role play is made possible for a more real-life situation

**3. Active learning**
-Learning by doing, active participation of students in every group activity

**4. Natural reinforcers**
-Experience positive consequences as a result of participation in the elarning process

**5. Repetition**
-"Overlearning" with slight variations in repetition leads to better generalization

**6. Relaxation**
-Strategies to "calm down" before making any decisions when faced with a problem; relaxation is a substitute for acting impulsively

**7. Extensive use of role-plays**
-Make the learning opportunity as realistic and familiar as possible
-Involve many students in the learning process
-Make learning fun and interesting

**8. • Identifying emotions**
-Recognition of emotions is a step toward coping with difficult emotions
-Understanding the causality between emotion and actions/experiences *both ways.*

**9. • Visual prompts**
-Provide an easy way to remember the things learned
-Separate the components of a sequence that is being taught
-Help invoive in the learning process participants who have limited spoken language

**10.• Individualized instruction**
-Assigning each participant tasks that he/she can do and understand

**11.• Group rules**
-Generated by the participants (create a sense of group ownership)
-Help structure the interactions during the sessions
-Provide a good way to stop inappropriate behavior.